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Development Aid and Access to Water and Sanitation in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Background

The disparities in performance among African countries in terms of access to water and sanitation call for an examination of factors that determine the effectiveness of development aid in these sectors. On this basis, the African Development Bank's (AfDB) Water and Sanitation Department (OWAS) and its Development Research Department (EDRE) have initiated a study on "Development Aid and Access to Water and Sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa".

Objectives and Implementation Arrangements

The study seeks to analyse the relationship between development aid flows and progress in access to water and sanitation services in sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, it aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify the factors determining performance in the provision of safe water and improved sanitation facilities;
- Identify the factors and features determining the success and sustainability of aid-funded projects in these sectors;
- Draw lessons for the design and implementation of future water and sanitation interventions.

The study is implemented in partnership with a consultant affiliated to the Oxford University Centre for Water Research. The study examines the trends in access to water and sanitation in sub-Saharan Africa using secondary data and desk research. It then undertakes focused field research in four countries, namely, Burkina Faso, Kenya, Madagascar and Uganda. The case studies are based on primary data collected from Water and Finance Ministries, as well as from meetings and interviews with beneficiaries of AfDB-funded water and sanitation projects.

Implementation Status

The study was conceptualised in 2008 and field missions were successfully conducted between December 2008

and March 2009. The collected primary data are currently being analysed by AfDB staff and the preliminary findings will be presented at a staff seminar in early 2010.

Findings

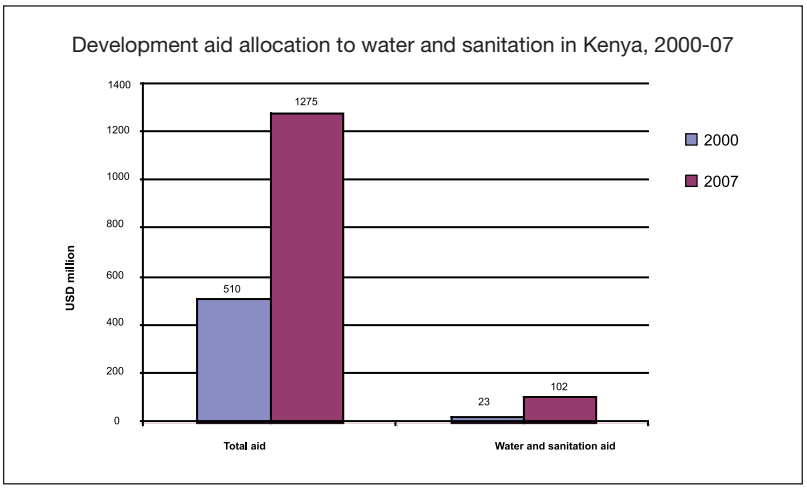
The total coverage of improved drinking water in sub-Saharan Africa increased from 49 percent in 1990 to 58 percent in 2006. This means that an additional 207 million people are now using safe drinking water. Over the same period, access to improved sanitation increased rather slowly from 26 percent to 31 percent.

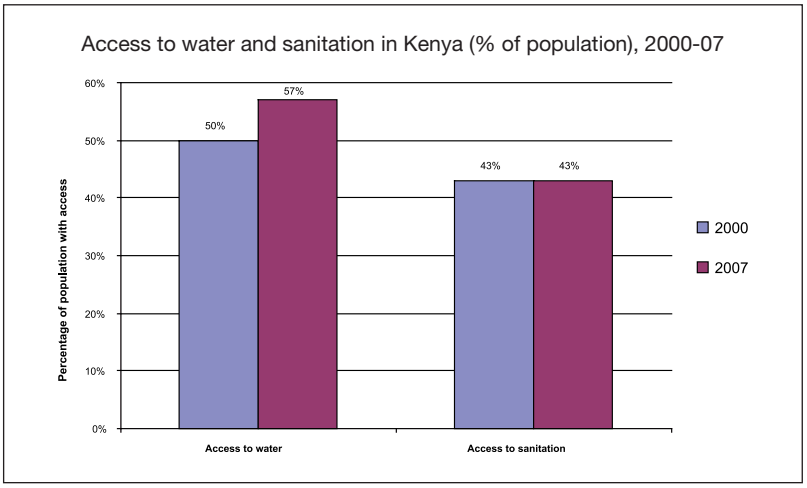
Current trends indicate that sub-Saharan Africa will not meet the Millennium Development Goals of halving the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation by 2015. At the current pace, the access-to-water target of the MDGs will be met in 2040, and the access-to-sanitation target in 2076.

In some sub-Saharan African countries, aid covers up to 90 percent of national water and sanitation expenditures (WHO 2008). Nonetheless, the sector still receives a small share of total aid. Between 2002 and 2007, aid allocation to water and sanitation projects increased from 0.9 percent of overall Official Development Assistance (USD 218 million) to 1.5 percent (USD 472 million) (OECD 2009).

The AfDB loan and grant approvals in the water and sanitation sectors increased from UA 67 million (3.3 percent of total) in 2002 to UA 211 million (6.8 percent of total) in 2007. Over the same period, disbursements grew from UA 52 million to UA 109 million per year.[1]

In Kenya – one of the four case studies – total official development assistance increased from USD 510 million in 2000 to USD 1,275 million in 2007 (OECD 2009). Development aid allocation to water and sanitation sectors increased from USD 23 million to USD 102 million in the same period, that is, from 4.5 percent to 8 percent of total aid. Access to water increased from 50 percent to 57 percent in the same period. However, no progress was recorded in access to sanitation, which remained stagnant at 43 percent from 2000 to 2004 (the latest year for which data is available).





[1] In October 2009, UA 1 = USD 1.58 and UA 1 = EUR 1.08. Data is reported in UA in order to remove the variability due to the fluctuation of any particular currency.

Policy Lessons

Country experiences indicate that the following elements are key to increasing efficiency in the water and sanitation sector:

- Improved sector coordination, with assignment of clear responsibility to one ministry accountable for progress in the achievement of water and sanitation targets;
- Increased integration between policy making, planning, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation;
- Increased focus on capacity building, especially at the local level. This refers to all stages of water and sanitation projects – from planning to procurement, to execution, monitoring and maintenance;
- Promotion of linkages among stakeholders, including government bodies and donors, and civil society organisations.

Experience further shows that countries that adopt well-designed water utility reforms are substantially improving access to services and making progress in financial capacity to sustain and expand the services. Evidence from countries such as Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal and Zambia shows that reforms work. The types of reforms that have been demonstrated to be successful in alleviating problems in water and sanitation include:

- The introduction of improved institutional frameworks. This includes the establishment of laws, rights, and licenses, and the definition of clear responsibilities of different actors ranging from local watershed management institutions to international basin agencies;
- The introduction of mechanisms for effective participation of stakeholders, and knowledge and information systems;
- The development and management of an infrastructure for annual and multi-year flow regulation – for floods and droughts, for multi-purpose storage, and for water quality and source protection;
- The use of operating contracts between the utility and the public agency responsible for supervising water companies;
- The establishment of clear accountability systems and the introduction of incentives for employees that directly tie compensation to performance;
- The introduction of improved commercial systems, including metering and metered billing;
- The introduction of explicit models for delivering services to poor consumers, accounting for service sustainability and integrating the specificities of the local context.

These lessons should be incorporated in AfDB's planning and evaluation of projects in the water and sanitation sectors. This would contribute to improving the effectiveness of the Bank's interventions in these sectors.

Comments and suggestions can be sent to:

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